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Baesler Appoints Task Force On Student Assessments

BISMARCK, N.D., Aug. 3, 2015 -- Superintendent of Public Instruction Kirsten Baesler on Monday appointed a task force to study policy on student assessments, which are used to measure the academic progress of North Dakota students.

The group has 33 members. It includes parents, home educators, legislators, business representatives, teachers and administrators from public and nonpublic schools, higher education officials, and technology and assessment specialists.

Baesler will serve as chairwoman of the task force. Its first meeting will be held in September in Bismarck. A date will be picked later. Baesler expects the group will meet monthly, and take nine months to provide recommendations.

State and federal laws now require regular testing of North Dakota students. For example, the North Dakota State Assessment in English and mathematics is given each year to students in grades three through eight and grade 11. The annual state assessment in science is given in grades four, eight and 11. State law also requires North Dakota students to take the ACT exam in the 11th grade.

Baesler said the task force will examine “what North Dakota needs and values” from the assessments, review all testing options available, and make recommendations about future assessment strategy that best meets the needs of North Dakota.

Most task force members were nominated by stakeholder groups. Baesler personally selected additional members, including Jim Kasper, of Fargo, whom Baesler chose as a business and industry representative. Kasper was the primary sponsor of legislation to end North Dakota’s membership in Smarter Balanced and prohibit the Department of Public Instruction from supporting North Dakota’s new math and English learning standards. The bill was defeated in the House.

Baesler also personally chose Bismarck parent Stacey Castleman, who is a leader in the Stop Common Core in North Dakota group and North Dakota Operation Opt-Out, an anti-testing group.

The task force’s work will be especially timely given the debate in Congress over a new version of the No Child Left Behind education law, Baesler said. Both the U.S. House and Senate have approved new versions of the law, and a group of House and Senate negotiators will be working out its final details.

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Baesler said she expects any new federal legislation will provide states greater flexibility in student testing.

Regular assessments provide a snapshot of how well students are learning the information that they need to know, and their ability to apply that knowledge, Baesler said. North Dakota taxpayers make a substantial investment in public education, and assessments provide them and state policymakers useful information about the results, the superintendent said.

Lists of task force members and the student assessments required by state and federal laws and regulations are attached to this press release.

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